

MEMORANDUM FOR Soldiers and DA Civilians within the 8th Theater Support Command (TSC)

SUBJECT: Safely Preparing For Your Holiday Meals

Food safety is especially important as our Soldiers, DA Civilians and families prepare their holiday meals. When preparing Poultry, Beef, Pork, Lamb and Seafood remain conches of the six main safety hazards: shopping, thawing, preparation, stuffing, marinades and cooking to adequate temperature. These preparation tips intended to serve as safety reminders to those who are already familiar with meat, seafood and poultry preparation safety and as guidelines for the first-time chef.

Shopping

- Purchase refrigerated or frozen items after selecting your non-perishables.
- Never choose meats in packaging that is damaged, torn or leaking.
- Do not buy food past "Sell-By," "Use-By," or other expiration dates.

Safe Thawing Poultry, Beef, Pork and Lamb must be kept at a safe temperature. The "danger zone" for raw meats in general is between 40 and 140°F — the temperature range where food borne bacteria multiply rapidly. While frozen, a turkey is safe indefinitely, but as soon as it begins to thaw, bacteria that may have been present before freezing can begin to grow again, if the temperature is in the "danger zone." There are three safe ways to thaw food: in the refrigerator, in cold water, and in a microwave oven.

Safe Preparation Bacteria present on raw Poultry, Beef, Pork and Lamb can contaminate your hands, utensils, and work surfaces as you prepare them. If these areas are not cleaned thoroughly before working with other foods, bacteria from the raw meat can then be transferred to other foods. After working with raw meats, always wash your hands, utensils, and work surfaces before they touch other foods.

Safe Stuffing For optimal safety and uniform doneness, cook the stuffing outside the turkey in a casserole dish. However, if you place stuffing inside the turkey, do so just before cooking, and use a food thermometer. Make sure the center of the stuffing reaches a safe minimum internal temperature of 165°F. Bacteria can survive in stuffing that has not reached 165°F, possibly resulting in food borne illness.

Marinades To avoid food contamination, marinades used for raw meats should not be reused for basting. The best way to safely use a marinade as a basting sauce is to set aside a portion of the marinade before adding the remaining marinade to the uncooked meat. Then baste with clean utensils and reserved marinade when grilling.

Safe Cooking Set the oven temperature no lower than 325°F and be sure the turkey is completely thawed. Place turkey breast-side up on a flat wire rack in a shallow roasting pan 2 to 2-1/2 inches deep. Check the internal temperature at the center of the stuffing and most meaty portion of the breast, thigh, and wing joint using a food thermometer. Cooking times will vary.

The food thermometer must reach a safe minimum internal temperature of 165°F. Let the turkey stand 20 minutes before removing all stuffing from the cavity and carving the meat.

- Beef, veal, and lamb steaks, roasts, and chops may be cooked to 145 °F.
- All cuts of pork, 160 °F.
- Ground beef, veal and lamb to 160 °F.
- All poultry should reach a safe minimum internal temperature of 165 °F.

Serving

- Hot food should be held at 140 °F or Hotter.
- Cold food should be held at 40 °F or colder.
- When serving food at a buffet, keep food hot with chafing dishes, slow cookers, and warming trays. Keep food cold by nesting dishes in bowls of ice or use small serving trays and replace them often.
- Perishable food should not be left out more than 2 hours at room temperature (1 hour when the temperature is above 90 °F).

Leftovers

- Discard any food left out at room temperature for more than 2 hours (1 hour if the temperature was above 90 °F).
- Place food into shallow containers and immediately put in the refrigerator or freezer for rapid cooling.
- Use cooked leftovers within 4 days.

Refreezing Meat and poultry defrosted in the refrigerator may be refrozen before or after cooking. If thawed by other methods, cook before refreezing.

Shopping for Seafood Buying from a retailer who follows proper food handling practices helps assure that the seafood you buy is safe - and helps maintain the quality of the seafood too. Be sure to check out a market's seafood counter carefully to see whether the seller is practicing proper food handling techniques. Ask yourself: What is my general impression of this facility? Does it look and smell clean?

Fresh Fish Only buy fish that is refrigerated or properly iced. Fish should be displayed on a thick bed of fresh ice that is not melting, and preferably in a case or under some type of cover.

Fish should smell fresh and not fishy, sour, or ammonia-like.

- A fish's eyes should be clear and bulge a little (except for a few naturally cloudy-eyed fish types, such as walleye pike).

- Whole fish and filets should have firm, shiny flesh and bright red gills free from slime. Dull flesh could mean the fish is old. Note: Fish fillets that have been previously frozen may have lost some of their shine, but they are fine to eat.
- The flesh should spring back when pressed.
- Fish fillets should display no darkening or drying around the edges. They should have no green or yellowish discoloration, and should not appear dry or mushy in any areas.

Frozen Fish: Know What To Look For Today, fresh catches can be processed and frozen immediately to very low temperatures - frequently, this takes place right on the fishing vessel. However, frozen seafood can spoil if the fish thaws during transport and is left at warm temperatures for too long. To help ensure that the frozen fish you're buying is safe, follow these guidelines.

- Don't buy frozen seafood if its package is open, torn or crushed along the edges.
- Avoid packages that are positioned above the "frost line" or top of the freezer case in the store's freezer. They may not be at the proper storing temperature.
- If the package cover is transparent, look for signs of frost or ice crystals. These could mean the fish has been stored a long time or thawed and refrozen - in which case, choose another package.

Selecting Shellfish: The Food and Drug Administration requires shellfish harvesters and processors of oysters, clams, and mussels to put a tag on sacks or containers of live shellfish (in the shell), and a label on containers or packages of shucked shellfish.

- Tags and labels contain specific information about the product, including a certification number for the processor, which means that the shellfish were harvested and processed in accordance with national shellfish safety controls.
- Ask to see the tag or check the label when purchasing shellfish.
- Discard Cracked/Broken Ones: Throw away clams, oysters, and mussels if their shells are cracked or broken.
- Do a "Tap Test": Live clams, oysters, and mussels will close up when the shell is tapped. If they don't close when tapped, do not select them.
- Check for Leg Movement: Live crabs and lobsters should show some leg movement. They spoil rapidly after death, so only live crabs and lobsters should be selected and prepared.

Storing Seafood Keep it safe until you eat it. Place seafood on ice or in the refrigerator / freezer soon after buying it, using these guidelines for safe storage.

- If seafood will be used within two days after purchase, store it in the refrigerator.
- If seafood won't be used within two days after purchase, wrap it tightly in moisture-proof freezer paper or foil to protect it from air leaks, and store it in the freezer.

Preparing Seafood Thaw frozen seafood gradually by placing it in the refrigerator overnight. If you have to thaw seafood quickly, either seal it in a plastic bag and immerse it in cold water, or -

if the food will be cooked immediately thereafter - microwave it on the "defrost" setting and stop the defrost cycle while the fish is still icy but pliable.

Prevent Cross-Contamination When you're preparing fresh or thawed seafood, it's very important to prevent bacteria from the raw seafood from spreading to ready-to-eat food. Take these steps to avoid cross-contamination between raw and cooked foods.

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm water before and after handling any raw food.
- Wash the cutting board with soap and hot water to remove food particles and juices after using it for raw foods such as seafood, and before using the board for cooked or ready-to-eat foods or preparing another food item.
- As an added precaution, sanitize cutting boards by rinsing them in a solution made of one teaspoon of chlorine bleach in one quart of water - or run the plastic board through the wash cycle in your automatic dishwasher. Or, consider using one cutting board only for raw foods and another only for ready-to-eat foods such as bread, fresh fruit and vegetables, and cooked fish.
- As a rule of thumb, avoid using cutting boards that are made of soft, porous materials. Instead, choose those made of hard maple or plastic, and make sure they are free of cracks and crevices. Smooth surfaces can be cleaned more easily and thoroughly.

Cook It Properly Most seafood should be cooked to an internal temperature of 145 °F. But if you don't have a food thermometer, there are other ways to determine whether seafood is done.

- Fish: Slip the point of a sharp knife into the flesh and pull it aside. The flesh should be opaque and separate easily. If you cooked the fish in the microwave, check it in more than one spot to help ensure doneness.
- Shrimp and Lobster: The flesh becomes pearly-opaque.
- Scallops: The flesh turns milky white or opaque and firm.
- Clams, Mussels, and Oysters: Watch for the point at which their shells open, which means they're done. Throw out the ones that don't open.

Serving Seafood Cross-contamination can happen once your seafood is cooked, too. Here are simple ways to keep your seafood safe when serving.

- Place cooked seafood on a clean plate for serving. If cooked foods are placed on an unwashed plate that previously held raw seafood, bacteria from the raw food could contaminate the cooked seafood.
- Use clean utensils to serve food - not those used in preparation of the raw food.

Temperature Counts Follow these serving guidelines once your seafood is cooked and ready to be enjoyed.

- Never leave seafood or other perishable food out of the refrigerator for more than 2 hours - or, for more than 1 hour when temperatures are above 90 °F. Bacteria that can cause illness grow quickly at warm temperatures (temperatures between 40 °F and 140 °F).

- Carry picnic seafood in a cooler with a cold pack or ice. When possible, put the cooler in the shade. Keep the lid closed as much of the time as you can.
- When it's party time, keep hot seafood hot and cold seafood separated.
- Divide hot party dishes containing seafood into smaller serving platters. Keep platters refrigerated until time to reheat them for serving.
- Keep cold seafood on ice or serve it throughout the gathering from platters kept in the refrigerator.

Eating Raw Seafood It's always best to cook seafood thoroughly to minimize the risk of food borne illness. However, if you choose to eat raw fish anyway, one rule of thumb is to eat fish that has been previously frozen.

- Some species of fish can contain parasites, and freezing will kill any parasites that may be present.
- However, be aware that freezing doesn't kill all harmful microorganisms. That's why the safest route is to cook your seafood.

An Important Note about Oysters: Some oysters are treated for safety after they are harvested. That information may or may not be on the label. However, these oysters should still not be eaten raw by people at risk for food borne illness. The post-harvest treatment eliminates some naturally occurring pathogens, but it does not remove all pathogens that can cause illness.

Special Health Notes Keep in mind that some people are at greater risk for food borne illness, and should not eat raw or partially cooked fish or shellfish. These susceptible groups include.

- Pregnant women
- Young children
- Older adults
- Persons whose immune systems are compromised
- Persons who have decreased stomach acidity

If you are unsure of your risk, ask your healthcare provider.

Smoked Seafood: Avoiding Listeriosis Pregnant women, older adults, and people with weakened immune systems have an increased chance of getting a food borne illness called listeriosis. If you are in one of these groups, there is a simple step you can take to reduce your chance of contracting the listeriosis disease from seafood.

- Avoid refrigerated types of smoked seafood except in a cooked recipe, such as a casserole. Refrigerated smoked seafood, such as salmon, trout, whitefish, cod, tuna, or mackerel, is usually labeled as "nova-style," "lox," "kippered," "smoked," or "jerky" and can be found in the refrigerated section of grocery stores and delicatessens. They should be avoided.
- You needn't worry about getting listeriosis from canned or shelf-stable smoked seafood.

Special Health Notes for Moms and Moms-to-Be If you are pregnant, nursing your child, or thinking about becoming pregnant, it is important that you avoid consuming too much methyl mercury. This substance can be found in certain fish, and it can harm an unborn child's developing nervous system if eaten regularly.

Don't Eat . . . Avoid these four fish species.

- Shark
- Swordfish
- King mackerel
- Tilefish

However, don't deny yourself or your unborn baby the nutritional benefits of fish - you can eat 12 ounces (2 average meals) a week of other types of cooked fish, as long as you eat a variety of kinds that are lower in mercury. This same advice should be followed when you're feeding fish and shellfish to your young child, but serve smaller portions.

Do Eat . . . Five of the most commonly eaten fish that are low in mercury are.

- Shrimp
- Canned light tuna
- Salmon
- Pollock
- Catfish

"Local Catch" Alert Be sure and check local advisories about the safety of fish caught by family and friends in your local lakes, rivers, and coastal areas.

Another commonly-eaten fish, albacore ("White") tuna, has more mercury than canned light tuna. So, when choosing your two meals of fish and shellfish, you may eat up to 6 ounces (one average meal) of albacore tuna per week.

Storage

- Always refrigerate perishable food within 2 hours (1 hour when the temperature is above 90 °F).
- Check the temperature of your refrigerator and freezer with an appliance thermometer. The refrigerator should be at 40 °F or below and the freezer at 0 °F or below.
- Cook or freeze fresh poultry, fish, ground meats, and variety meats within 2 days; other beef, veal, lamb, or pork, within 3 to 5 days.
- Perishable food such as meat and poultry should be wrapped securely to maintain quality and to prevent meat juices from getting onto other food.
- To maintain quality when freezing meat and poultry in its original package, wrap the package again with foil or plastic wrap that is recommended for the freezer.
- In general, high-acid canned food such as tomatoes, grapefruit, and pineapple can be

stored on the shelf for 12 to 18 months. Low-acid canned food such as meat, poultry, fish, and most vegetables will keep 2 to 5 years if the can remains in good condition and has been stored in a cool, clean, and dry place. Discard cans that are dented, leaking, bulging, or rusted.

Using these food safety guidelines will help you prepare a safe holiday meals that everyone will enjoy. For more information and safety tips on holiday safety visit these sites

www.cookingsafety.org www.holidaysafety.org